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ABSTRACT

As part of the Final Report of the National Study of American Indian Education, this background study provides information on the Pima Central and Blackwater schools on the Gila River reservation south of Phoenix, Arizona. Socioeconomic and community background data are given on location and climate, transportation, government, housing, and economy. A description of the Pima Central School, operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), discusses student transportation, enrollment, staff size, physical structure, administration, curriculum, and extracurricular activities. The Pima Central School, it is predicted, will become a local public school and no longer will be operated by the BIA. The second school reported upon, the BIA-operated Blackwater School located 5 miles east of Sacaton, Arizona, has only a kindergarten and first grade. The document contains 1 map. (AL)

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The National Study of American Indian Education

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Final Report

COMMUNITY BACKGROUND REPORTS

Series I
No. 22

PIMA CENTRAL SCHOOL

BLACKWATER SCHOOL

Sacaton, Arizona

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Christine Brown
Robert J. Havighurst
June, 1970

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NATIONAL STUDY OF AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

The attached paper is one of a number which make up the Final Report of the National Study of American Indian Education.

This Study was conducted in 1968-69-70 with the aid of a grant from the United States Office of Education, OEC-0-8-080147-2805.

The Final Report consists of five Series of Papers:

I. Community Backgrounds of Education in the Communities Which Have Been Studied.

II. The Education of Indians in Urban Centers.

III. Assorted Papers on Indian Education--mainly technical papers of a research nature.

IV. The Education of American Indians--Substantive Papers.

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P I M A C E N T R A L S C H O O L

Location and Climate

Pima Central School is located in Sacaton, an Indian farming community situated along the dry bed of the Little Gila River 22 miles west of Casa Grande, 20 miles southeast of Phoenix, Arizona. (See Map 1.) Sacaton is on the Gila River reservation which covers 371,932 acres and includes an estimated population of 6,125. It is characterized by a desert climate with high temperatures and little rainfall.

Some Maricopa Indians share the reservation, although the Pimas are the major residents. The Pimas are probably descendants of the Hohokam, agricultural peoples who occupied the Gila River area prior to the 14th century.

Sacaton is a center of government, tribal, religious and educational agencies. All of the government buildings, tribal offices, business offices, three churches, and one store are within walking distance of each other. There is a recreation building with a newly added restaurant within a half mile of the school. A new community building is under construction and a new service station will be opening. The State Agricultural Extension Building houses Homemaker and 4-H projects. The postoffice and legal aid service are in the new tribal building. Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches are present in the community.

The area surrounding Sacaton is mostly farmland. The Gila River runs nearby but it is usually dry. Scattered dwellings are interspersed between Sacaton and the various villages served by Pima Central School: Casa Blanca, Goodyear, Santan, Sacaton, Flats, Oberg and Progressive Colony.

Transportation

Cars or pickup trucks, some old some new, are prevalent in the community. Those who have none hire others to transport them on trips. There is also a Greyhound Bus stop in Sacaton.

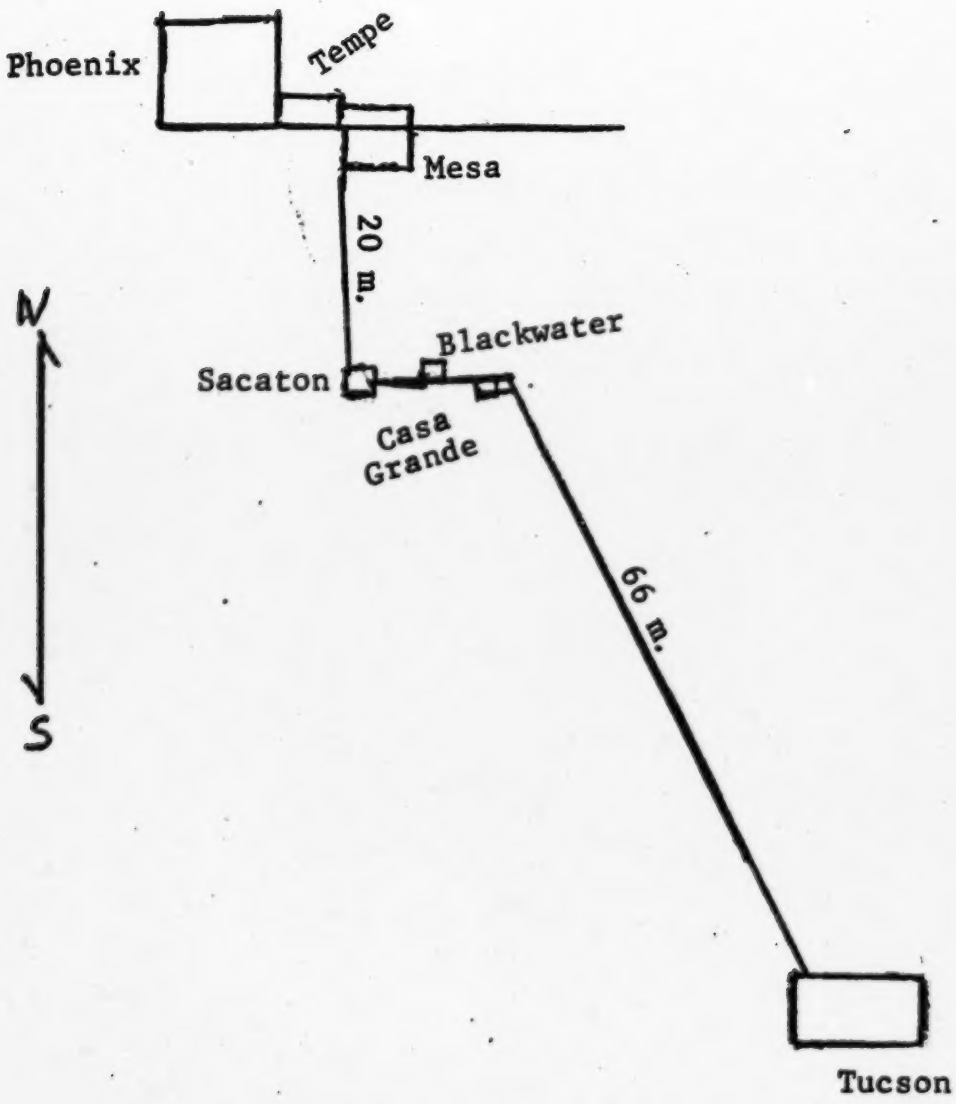
Government

The political structure of Sacaton is organized around two groups: the tribal leaders, who legislate for the reservation; and the BIA officials, whose primary function is to actualize government programs.

Housing

The housing in Sacaton is scattered in an informal fashion. The Indians live in adobe, sandwich or mud houses. Some have self-help homes for which the government provides the materials and the Indians provide the labor. Natural gas is used for cooking. Wood stoves and some butane stoves are used in the areas away from the towns. Most homes have electricity. Some have television, washing machines, gas stoves and refrigerators. Most of the Indian homes have bare dirt yards.

In contrast, the non-Indian Bureau of Indian Affairs personnel live in well-constructed homes maintained with the help of hired gardeners.



Map 1. Sacaton, Arizona

Economy

The economy of the community derives from farming; civil service and tribal jobs; federal assistance programs such as "Mainstream" and Community Action (CAP), financed by the United States under the Economy Opportunity Act; and public welfare including Old Age Assistance and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Fractionated land holdings, the result of the government's early allotment program, and lack of funds to drill wells prevent many Pimas from farming their land. Instead, land is leased to white farmers. A tribal farming operation might be successful if individuals would combine allotments.

Many Indians live off the reservation near jobs or commute to job locations outside of Sacaton. Some have been relocated to other cities for job-training and employment. Farm workers are poorly paid. The tribal leaders and large lease-land holders are in better economic positions. The general level of unemployment in Sacaton, however, is low due to many government programs.

EDUCATION

Pima Central School

Pima Central School is a BIA day school serving the districts of Casa Blanca, Goodyear, Sacaton Flats, Oberg, Santan, and Progressive Colony, all within a 12-mile radius of Sacaton. The students are transported to and from the school by bus.

Pima Central originated as a boarding school and later changed to a day school. Students in the 4th through 8th grades attend the school. There is a public school for first, second, and third grades. The county added a kindergarten to the primary grades for children whose parents want them to go to public school. Plans for this BIA school are to phase out a grade each year and turn Pima Central into a public school.

Pima Central School has an enrollment of 238 students. There are 118 boys and 120 girls. The school has eight teachers; only one is Indian. The four teacher aides are Indian.

Physical Structure

Pima Central School is built of concrete blocks. Although the building is about thirty-four years old, it appears to be in good condition. Pima Central has seven classrooms, a library which is a single large room, a principal's office, a teachers' lounge, a coffee room, and restrooms. Some of the classrooms are equipped with audio-visual aids. Although the library has books in the files on other Indian tribes, there are no books on the Pima culture. There is a recently remodeled dining room separated from the school that is jointly operated and used by Pima Central and the public school in Sacaton. To the north of the school building are five basketball courts. A baseball field is located on the east side. On the south side there is a playground with swings and slides. In addition, there is a large front yard with grass and trees and the north and south sides of Pima Central are fenced in.

Administration

Pima Central has no auxiliary staff or school board. It has instead an "Educational Coordinating Committee" composed of the reservation principal, a member from the Tribal Advisory Board, the Pima Central principal, the CAP director, the health educator, and a member from the public school board. The school is operated jointly by the United States Department of the Interior, the BIA Commissioner, the Phoenix Area office, and the Office of Tribal Operations. The responsibilities of a superintendent are carried out by the reservation principal, school principal, and teachers.

Curriculum

The curriculum at Pima Central School follows the prescribed state courses of study and parallels that of the public schools. The school has an Adult Education Program and a Head Start Program. There is a school code of behavior. A recent innovation is the development of culturally oriented materials to be used in the classes.

Extra curricular activities include athletics in competition with other schools, field trips, band, and a Christmas operetta. Pima Central publishes two student newspapers. The earliest edition was the Pima Gazette which was comprised of news on grades one through six. The articles written by students are about significant events in their home and school life. The Pima Pageant succeeded the Gazette and covered the school news class by class. Current newspapers are the Progress published by the fifth grade, and the Pima Central Times published by the sixth grade. The Times is made up of student articles about their activities and projects while the Progress is a showcase edition with articles that are mainly reprints of national news releases. For the most part the publications were anglicized presentations. Some of the covers had Indian pictures and there was included an interesting and well written mythology on "The Snake Ceremonies of the Hopis of Arizona."

Blackwater Community School

Located on a surfaced road about 5 miles east of Sacaton, toward Casa Grande, is the Blackwater School, a small, fairly new building with a small school yard, and a small, relatively new community center building.

While the Pima Central School will become a local public school, the Blackwater School will continue to be supported by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and operated by a local Indian School Board. On paper, the Blackwater School is in the same category as the Rough Rock School--operated by an Indian School Board on a contract from the BIA. However, Blackwater has not received the wide public notice, nor the financial assistance from non-BIA sources that have brought Rough Rock into the limelight.

At the time of this study the school had only a kindergarten and first grade. In addition to the teachers, there is an Indian community aide.

If the Indian community chooses to carry on its contract with the BIA to operate Blackwater School, there will be an interesting competition between this school and the neighboring all-Indian public school to see which school the Indian families will choose for their children.